



March 2010

Uncompahgre Mesas Forest Restoration Project

Collaboration Case Study



COLORADO FOREST
RESTORATION INSTITUTE

Colorado State University

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Corrie Knapp

Prepared for the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute

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ABOUT THE COLORADO FOREST RESTORATION INSTITUTE

The Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI) at Colorado State University was established in 2005 per the authorizing language of the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2004 and chartered by the Western Governors Association. CFRI is part of the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes along with the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University and the New Mexico Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute at New Mexico Highlands University. The purpose of CFRI is to conduct, compile, synthesize, and translate scientific research to support restoration and wildfire risk mitigation decision-making by affected entities identified in the Act.

CFRI works with public and private forest land managers, researchers, collaborative partnerships, elected officials, non-government organizations, and the general public to identify needs. Annual work plans are developed based on an assessment of these needs and in consultation with an interagency Development Team. An interagency Executive Team approves and oversees accomplishments of the work plans. Funding for CFRI comes from appropriations through the US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University.

CFRI has four programmatic emphases areas:

- Information synthesis, outreach, and application
- Collaborative monitoring and adaptive management assistance
- Enhancing wood biomass utilization (in partnership with the COWOOD program of the Colorado State Forest Service)
- Collaboration assistance and support

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About this report

Colorado is endowed with several place-based collaborative efforts focused on reducing wildfire risk to communities and restoring healthy forest conditions. Individuals from government agencies, local communities, business and non-governmental organizations of all stripes voluntarily participate in a process to achieve goals they could not achieve by working alone. This is hard work for which many participants receive no direct financial compensation; they are simply taking what they think is the best approach to solve immediate problems affecting surrounding forests and communities.

As is often the case when people are busy figuring out what needs to be done, there is little time for reflection and learning on what they have accomplished and the road ahead. To this end, the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute commissioned Corrie Knapp, a recent M.S. graduate from the Department of Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Stewardship at Colorado State University, to conduct case studies of two collaborative forest health efforts, the Uncompahgre Mesas Forest Restoration Project and the Woodland Park Initiative. The intent is to highlight each effort's accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned so that others working in similar collaboratives might glean ideas, insights and innovations to apply to their situations.

The case studies were composed of semi-structured anonymous interviews¹ which focused on what the participants of these collaboratives perceived as the key accomplishments, challenges and lessons learned from their own experiences. Many thanks to all those who participated in the interviews.

¹ The interview protocol was approved by the Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board, protocol #082-09H.

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HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Uncompahgre Mesas Forest Restoration Project (UP Mesas) began in 2007, but rested on a deep history of collaboration around natural resources in the region. With roots in the Public Lands Partnership (formed in 1994), the UP project (formed in 2000), and the Restoration Network (2004), the UP Mesas begun with a history of integrating science, working with diverse stakeholders and collaborating for creative solutions. Many of the participants had been involved with the Burn Canyon monitoring project in 2005, and had seen first hand the importance of bringing the best science to decision-making. Their experience in this project had also cemented their interest in looking at resource issues holistically and integrating both ecological and economic impacts.

The UP Mesas project was established with the goal to enhance the resiliency, diversity and productivity of the native ecosystem in the Uncompahgre Mesas area of the Uncompahgre Plateau, Colorado using best available science and collaboration. The collaboration came about because of concerns from agency staff, conservationists and citizens about the health of the forest. From the beginning, the project was focused on forest restoration, a goal that was well received and supported by community members. As one participant recalled, “it helped to start with the title “forest restoration.” It seems like a really subtle thing, but who can argue with it?” Since people were in agreement about the need for restoration, conflict was low. As one participant stated, “What the project is trying to do didn’t really challenge the stakeholders so much.”

One of the key organizing principles of the collaborative has been to get the group out on the ground so that they are grounded in a specific landscape, and have opportunities to develop relationships with one another. Several of these field trips have served as pivotal moments in the history of the collaborative. At the beginning of the collaboration, in

June of 2007, participants took a tour of potential places where restoration may be needed. This field trip helped participants to gain a tangible picture of what the forests looked like currently and prioritize goals for future work. At another field meeting in November, a crucial conversation took place, where conservationists expressed that they would be willing to log some of the spruce in order to pay for restoration in the pine. As one participant stated, “(the conservationist) said they weren’t opposed to logging the high elevation forests, but they didn’t want it masquerading as restoration. We decided to develop some pilot projects to see what this would look like. That was a big turning point.” The third, and most transformative fieldtrip for many participants, was the forest forensics field trip in which participants were able to help collect data and gain a vision for what the forest once looked like. As one participant stated, “The fact that the people were involved in gathering the data and then saw how the data was collected and analyzed let them buy in to the ecological justification for restoration.” This field trip provided the data for a report on the historic range of variation for the region of interest. This document allowed the collaborative to base their restoration treatments on what the ecological data suggested that the forest had once looked like.

The result of the collaboration was a painless environmental impact process with no appeals or litigation. The project has marked trees and the restoration will begin this summer on a large landscape, including nearly 17,000 acres. This project shows how a well thought out project designed with the best available information can motivate a diverse group to come up with creative solutions. As one participant stated, “They had a good project to start with. They had the right idea. I know they have tried to be really transparent with everybody and use science and do the right thing as far as what is good for the forest.”

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

One accomplishment many participants mentioned was the ability to bring people to the table, keep them engaged, and build relationships between participants. As one participant stated, “Keeping a collaborative going keeps dedication and enthusiasm—I still don’t understand how people do it and nurture it. You have to get the right

personalities and situations and you build some energy that you can rely on and bank on later.” The ability to bring diverse interests together and maintain the enthusiasm and commitment of the group has been seen as a large accomplishment. When asked about accomplishments, one participant stated, “I think the fact that it is a collaborative and has worked so successfully as a collaborative and that is a bigger accomplishment than the on-the-ground results.” In the course of collaboration, participants speak of better relationships and understanding between interest groups. As one participant noted, “The friendships and relationships that we built were a huge success.”

Participants also noted a unique culture that was developed in the course of collaboration. The UP Project built on a long history of collaboration with the PLP, and many participants noted the importance of building a table of trust where they could learn about the resource and listen to conflicting opinions in an open forum. As one participant explained, “The PLP and the UPP had enough of a track record bringing dissimilar interests together and working through the challenges. People were expecting conflict, and they were also expecting that they could get past it.” They were able to get past it because they focused on bringing good information to the table, listening respectfully to dissimilar opinions, and staying grounded in place. One participant describes it this way, “because this atmosphere had been established, it was possible to be civil and constructive.”

Instead of steering away from potential conflict, participants spoke about the accomplishment of encouraging dialogue between these different viewpoints, and the ability to work through conflict was mentioned by many participants. Participants discussed how dialogue between opposing views on an issue often led to novel solutions. As one participant stated, “It was a real eye opener to have the small loggers meet the hard line environmentalists and gain an appreciation for the struggle for folks to make a living.” Many participants spoke of how maintaining grounding in a specific location helped people get past ideology and think creatively about alternatives. As one participant explained, “The trust that is created to allow for people to come with opinions, get educated on the same page and then be able to discuss and often times you find that

there aren't any real issues other than the sidebars or rules people have to work under.” The openness and honesty required from participants created a “community of trust that listens to each other and can work together.”

Many of the participants noted a change in the level of conflict around natural resource issues. As one participant explained, “It's getting better because of things like this. But not too long before this project the Forest Service was doing something—maybe the travel management plan for the GMUG and back then when you went to meetings you really didn't know if someone would pull out a gun.” This tense and conflict-oriented atmosphere has been transformed during the course of collaboration. As one participant noted, “Now, it is amazing. You go to the meetings now and every interest group sits at the table civilly and discusses the issues.” Participants have also seen a change in the way decisions are made regarding natural resources. As one participant said, “The change from the top-down (to collaborative) has been amazing. They brought the local government officials on board—just by inviting them to be a part of the process.” One accomplishment of the UP Project has been the creation of safe spaces to discuss natural resource issues and work together in decision-making.

Many of the participants discussed the accomplishment of effectively integrating science into decision-making. The PLP and UPP have a history of bringing the best available information to the table, in the belief that information about the resource is the best foundation for decision-making. As one participant related, “The Burn Canyon project had helped the PLP believe that good information was their friend and would help to provide a common view.” Instead of merely informing participants about past forest structure, participants assisted in a forensics study of the forest to assess what the forest had looked like. As one participant explained, “It was so interesting to me because foresters have a strong idea of what it looked like but it was a big surprise to be part of it and see what it was like.” This hands-on engagement with learning about the resource establishes a deeper commitment to the findings and outcomes. As one participant noted, “Everyone had buy-in because they were out in the field helping us collect the data that the assessment was built on.”

The incorporation of science also allowed people to move past their issues and focus on the facts about forest structure and restoration needs. As one participant explained, “Education is important because it brings everyone closer to the same page so they understand the issues and the laws that provide the framework for action.” The educational component of this collaborative led to a common understanding of the resource and a better-informed community. As one participant explained, “We have a group of people in this area that have a much better understanding of forest dynamics than they had before so they will be prepared if a large fire happens in the future.” The learning benefits of this collaborative group were mentioned as accomplishments by nearly all of the participants. As one participant said, “I think in the long run the most productive thing about our experiment in collaboration is the educational process.”

The learning opportunities that the integration of science provided also helped to create benefits for participants. As one participant explained, “Every time we go up there we learn a lot. We learn about how the forest used to be and how it can be again. It is really interesting stuff and it’s been a great learning experience.” This side-benefit from collaboration is critical because it helps keep participants engaged and motivated. As one participant noted, “I think the university connection is a real asset as well because it allows people to have learning opportunities. Anything you can do to help the participants feel like collaboration is worthwhile is a good thing to do.”

The substantive accomplishment mentioned by almost all of the participants was the approval of the project with no litigation. As one participant explained, “The fact that a record of decision was signed on the EA that was not appealed or litigated. It is big in every way and there have been no appeals or litigation.” Part of the reason for this success is that potential conflicts were resolved during the process instead of during the EA process. As one participant remarked, “At no point was anything challenged, because those that might have challenged it were a part of the process.” Another contribution to the lack of litigation was the fact that the EA was based on science that the participants had been a part of. As one participant explained, “We helped to provide the scientific

information to create a proposal that passed the EA process with a finding of no significant impact.” Participants felt they had been able to save time and potential frustrations by investing time into understanding the system and designing restoration that would benefit it. While some mentioned frustration at not moving to action, others were more realistic in their expectations. As one participant noted, “we aren’t done and haven’t completed everything yet, but the act of having produced something reasonable and having accomplished a couple important tasks as a large group in itself is a major thing that helped us adhere even better together.”

Participants feel that the process of collaboration has built the foundation for future projects and opportunities to work together. As one participant noted, “I think one of the other objectives of the group was to use this as a stepping stone to do more work together and there is recognition that that is a goal and we’ll keep working together to identify opportunities and there is still a lot of enthusiasm about continuing on with projects.” Given the investment and agreement among participants, they feel like there is the potential to expand this project to larger landscapes in the future. As one participant stated, “There is an easy opportunity for this to grow into a larger project as funds become available.” Many participants see this collaboration opening future doors. As one participant remarked, “Everyone along the chain is very supportive and committed to making this happen. It has really spurred a broader discussion about landscape scale possibilities. It raises the bar and catalyzes the opportunities to expand. Then you start achieving an ecology and economy of scale and I think this is an opportunity to look for that sweet spot.”

Finally, the UP Mesas project demonstrates the ability of collaborative groups to adapt and change to address new issues while slowly changing the structure of how resources are managed. As one participant noted, “there are these births and deaths, but they are all part of this largest arc and it is one of the few (ongoing collaborative groups) that we see in the west.” The UP Mesas is the newest collaborative in a series of groups that have changed the way that resources are governed in a specific place. As one participant noted, “You measure the success of a collaborative by measuring the ability to change the

institutional infrastructure of how a resource is governed. That is success. You can't go back, you can no longer do things the regular bureaucratic way." This participant is speaking about a larger structural change in the way that natural resources are managed and institutions are organized. The tenacity and endurance of this collaborative effort is not always easy, but it can accomplish gains larger than the span of an individual project. As one participant stated, "People's priorities shift, and there was some change over time, but also a surprising amount of continuity." This continuity has allowed the UP Mesas project to change over time, but contribute to a long-term trajectory in the way resources are managed.

CHALLENGES

The most consistent challenges discussed by participants in the UP Mesas project are the lack of funding for the restoration, which in turn has led to a lack of action on the ground. As one participant stated, "We have the EA signed for 8,000 acres of treatment, but there is no money to implement. Right now it is all hung up on budgets and trying to find money." As another participant explained, "It came down to the economics of it. Once you cut, you have to burn pretty quickly after. If you want to do it at a big scale it is going to take a huge concerted effort and it is going to take a lot of money. The estimation was about a million dollars."

The question of how to fund restoration efforts has been a continual and ongoing issue within this collaboration. The original seed money for the project was focused on Ponderosa Pine, which needed restoration, but that was not lucrative for the timber industry. As one participant noted, "At the beginning it was difficult because the CFRI money was for Ponderosa Pine and the conservation groups came with a desire to work with pine, but the timber industry and the Forest Service were wondering why we were spending all this time working on pine, but it was difficult to move everyone to a place where they were comfortable moving beyond pine."

This tension between ecological need and economic limitations has led to conflict between the timber industry and the rest of the collaboration. As one participant relayed,

“At some points the timber and logging end of it had no interest in doing the project. They wanted to do exactly what they wanted to do and nothing else.” When the timber industry stopped participating regularly, it added the challenge of assessing what was economically viable without having those participants at the table. As one participant remarked, “The timber industry wasn’t a consistent participant. I can understand why this one project wasn’t something they could justify the time in, but we wanted to make sure this was economically viable and it was hard to know if it would be viable. It was an objective of the group, but difficult to verify.”

Some of the participants felt that the funding side of restoration was not as transparent as the discussion about restoration goals and objectives. One participant stated, “We never got into the details of how much this stuff cost and that is the agency peoples job to do that but we could have learned more about that maybe.” Looking back several of them wished that they had known more about the funding situation earlier, so that they could begin to work on generating funds for the project. One participant said, “If we would have known that the Forest Service budgets would be so low, we would have looked for more funding.”

Participants have invested in dialogue and planning, but the lack of funding has led to the frustration among some participants that not enough is getting done on the ground. As one participant said, “If we don’t get something down on the ground, we could fall together in a heartbeat because people need to see something happen on the ground.” Another noted the same fear when she stated, “people are going to lose interest. I am worried that we’ll get to the point where the preparation and admin is done and we’ll just sit there. People need to see results and they have their eye on this.”

Time was the most consistent challenge individuals discussed related to their own participation. As one stated, “Time (is the biggest challenge). I mentioned earlier that I bailed out because I was feeling so overwhelmed. If I didn’t really believe in things like this, I couldn’t have managed to find time to put into the UP project.” Several of the participants interviewed were citizens and not representatives of organizations, and this

time commitment is most difficult when it is completely as a volunteer. As one citizen stated, “There are always three or four of us there taking it out of our hide. It is hard to keep people coming and sometimes I think I can’t do anymore, but I keep doing it.” Participants often expressed feeling overwhelmed by the time necessary for collaboration, although nearly all of them felt that the investment of time was necessary in order to reach good solutions. As one participant explained, “We chugged through that and when you work collaboratively it isn’t this fast (boom boom boom), it takes meetings, it takes talking with each other. It isn’t a wham-bam thing.”

The slow pace of collaboration, and its cycling back over time is challenging for some participants. One participant expressed frustration when she said, “At some of those meetings I thought, *I’ve been gone a year and what have you done since then?*” Collaboration can be slow because diverse participants need to be heard and understood. As one participant stated, “It was interesting when the group did this because in collaboration eventually everyone needs to speak to it in their own view.” Several participants felt frustration about covering ground that had been covered in past collaborations. As one participant stated, “The thing with collaboratives is that they can take an enormous amount of volunteer time, enormous, and so I have a real hard time if we don’t learn from our past collaborative efforts. I am to the point that I can’t start baby steps again and again and again....I get very critical when they take the time and make us invent ourselves again and again.” This was especially frustrating when turnover within the group made it necessary to rebuild trust and knowledge within the group. As one participant stated, “We call it a brain drain and some of the new people never communicated with the ones who left.”

One participant saw so much change of people in this collaborative that she questioned whether the collaboration should either die or continue. She stated, “Here is the question: Should the collaborative die? Continue to evolve? What are you when you are done? Are you even the same collaborative any more?” Another participant asked similar questions when he stated, “It is a completely different thing. But the question is, does it still serve a purpose? Maybe it isn’t the same purpose, but is it worthwhile?” These questions reflect

the growing pains of a collaborative group that endures past its original purpose. As one participant explained, “I’d say we aren’t as effective as we used to be, but this is our newest kernel of getting a new group together. It is starting again with baby steps.”

A larger bureaucratic hurdle for this collaboration is a lack of support and investment from the state office. As one participant explained, “Beyond the regional office, there is no support. It has everything to do with the attention being paid to the Mountain Pine Beetle.” This makes some participants frustrated since they see this collaborative as a potential model for other areas. As one participant related, “the project is truly significant for the state of CO in terms of shifting forest priorities, using science as a base for decision-making and overcoming conflict, but it hasn’t received the focus or the funding it deserves. It is a challenge we will continue to work on.” While participants continue to try to highlight their work, there is concern that a lack of wider support will discourage participants. As one stated, “It is something they could showcase about what we could do as an agency and that just isn’t there. The people who have been working on this are tremendously proud and yet they aren’t getting the feedback for that.”

Several potential future challenges were discussed in the course of interviews. One participant felt that not all players or interested parties were at the table including the Fish and Wildlife Service and the off-highway vehicle community, which may cause problems later in the process. As one participant noted, “I don’t think we are out of the woods yet, because that part of the project has to go through a process with the USFW. I don’t think we had all the people at the table: OHV users in general will be impacted by this project. This is one of the main access roads for the plateau and the proposal means cutting and burning, but also closing access to some of these roads.” In addition, there is some concern that the restoration principles decided upon by the group are too general and are difficult to translate onto the ground. As one participant stated, “As a technical person, the level of discussion was fairly general and having very general discussions and field trips, I found in implementation that it has to be translated into something that a seasonal employee can understand. That made the implementation more difficult.” Finally, some of the prescriptions, such as burning, may be infeasible in practice given ecological,

social and bureaucratic hoops. As one participant explained, “the fire managers seem to believe that it is less of a social issue and they don’t get a lot of complaints about the burns, but these are going to be bigger and hotter burns. They may not be able to burn as much as they would like because of ecological and regulatory hoops.”

LESSON

Start with a good project

Many of the participants in the UP Mesas project felt that it was the right project at the right time in the right place. As one participant stated, “It went fairly easy because they had the right project and were doing the right thing to start with.” Several stated the importance of the focus on ecological restoration to inspire and motivate people to work together. As one participant explained, “Starting with the title “forest restoration.” It seems like a really subtle thing, but who can argue with it? It can’t be duplicated, but find a title for what you are doing that seems positive to all of the stakeholders. It attracted people who really care about the health of the forest. It started from a really good platform. We were lucky I guess that our first meeting wasn’t filled with angry people.” Part of the success of the collaborative was attributed to the relative lack of conflict around the idea of restoration. As one participant stated, “This is one of a bunch of collaborations around public lands, but so few of them can show any results, much less good results. This is a situation where everyone involved thinks that this is a good thing to do.”

Get out on the ground

One key to the success of the UP Mesas project was their habit of getting out on the ground with one another in order to talk about management and resources in the woods. Active engagement with a real place helped participants bond to and invest in restoration. As one participant related, “We started with field tours and I remember when we got to Love Mesa and everyone said, *Ah Ha! This is the place we want to restore!*” Experiencing a place together also allowed the collaborative to stay grounded in place. As one participant stated, “It was very helpful for this group to continually get back out in the woods together so that we could see what we were talking about and see the

common ground.” In addition, field trips served as a way to build relationships and trust within the group. As one participant explained, “You need lots of campouts and time in the forest, take that time to build those relationships. That is the most important bit.” Collaborations require time and dedication, and it is important to keep members having fun and learning. As one participant noted, “Keep people engaged and make it fun. It was important to get everyone together in the woods.”

Chose an independent facilitator

Facilitation is a critical component of collaboration, and it was important for this effort that there was an independent organization capable of taking on this role. As one participant stated, “Having a really good facilitator is also really important. Someone who really understands the subject and issues and has worked in that area already. Personality really helps too—everyone needs to feel like they are honored.”

Many people talked about how this team member was able to steer the group without controlling it, and make sure that every member was making progress together.

Internal before external collaboration

Several members talked about some challenges that resulted from staff turnover in one of the member organizations. As one participant stated, “At one point, one of the challenges we have had is that there were some growing pains for CFRI because there were some changes in personnel there. There was a little backtracking that we had to do. It has all worked out now and I think the collaborative group has been able to help them work together better.” The lesson to be learned is that it is important to be able to work well within a single organization before trying to work across organizations as part of a larger collaborative group. As one participant remarked, “It is a lesson I have internalized as an observer, but if you don’t have internal collaboration it is difficult to collaborate with other groups. That could have created some huge credibility problems for us.”

The right team

Participants in the UP Mesas project stated that it was important to have the right group of participants. As one participant stated, “Part of our success was getting the right

people in the right room facilitated by the right people.” They emphasized that over time it is critical to continue to look around and make sure that the right people are at the table, because the right people may change over time. As one participant explained, “The number one thing is to look around and say, *Are the right people sitting around this table?* It can’t be lip service, you really need to believe that you need all those players.” This belief in inclusion led to constant addition and change in the group structure. As one participant stated, “We tend to get broader over time with stakeholders rather than eliminating them. I think that might be why we are a good collaborative.”

A place-based focus with place-based people

One of the things that contributed to the success of the UP Mesas Project is that it had a place-based focus and many of the participants lived and loved the area of interest. This deep connection to a specific landscape helped the group move past ideology and work on solutions. As one participant stated, “the place-based focus is really important, because it helps to depolarize arguments and keep people grounded. It grounds you in the real landscape.” The area under consideration is known and loved by community members. As one participant related, “There are a lot of people who recreate up there and are tied to this land and they go to the same specific place on the plateau year after year.” Participants were connected with the landscape and with the community that depends upon it. As one participant said, “They always kept sight of the fact that they cared about the landscape and the people who work in the landscape. People strongly believed that people should be able to make a living off landscapes without hurting them.” In addition to caring about the land and community, many of the participants knew the area well. This knowledge leads to a personal understanding of why restoration is necessary. As one participant stated, “I would love to see the ponderosas look like what they are supposed to. During the summer I do bird surveys and when you get a transect that looks like what it is supposed to, with those big trees, it is amazing—the forest is full of birds. But you don’t see that too often—there are usually too many scrawny trees and there is no comparison on the birds. I have seen so many bad to mediocre Ponderosas and I really want to see them the way they are supposed to be.”

Trust in the process

Many participants said that the process of collaboration is larger than each individual involved, and that it is important to be patient and believe in the process. As one participant stated, “You have to trust in the process and believe in the greater collective wisdom. That there can be wisdom in a collective setting and perspective that you didn’t have before. If you check some of your personal biases and trust each other you can produce something greater than the original parts. You have to give the process a chance but a certain piece of it is also luck.” What seems slow and unproductive is setting the stage for later productivity. As one participant said, “Some people felt like we spent too much time on the front end, maybe they thought that we talked for too long, but I don’t think that. I’ve been through a couple of these in the past and if you don’t spend that time then you don’t have the same vision and I don’t think we’ll have a lot of surprises when the trees start coming down.” Several talked about a circular process in collaboration, which can seem indirect, but that is often the most effective way to bring everyone into the process. As one participant explained, “It doesn’t feel direct, but you eventually get there.” Many said that looking back, they would have wanted to trust the process more because in the end it took them further than any other strategy. As one participant said, “There might be a few things we would want to speed up, but going slowly builds a good foundation for ongoing relationships and collaboration.” Several participants said that collaboration is not always pretty or easy, but the most important thing to do is to show up to meetings and commit. As one participant explained, “I guess when you are talking about endurance and just showing up. There are so many meetings where not much happens and just enough to keep things going. There are bonds and links that form through time and face-to-face encounters and those are critical.”

Focus on facts

Every participant in the UP Mesas project agreed that a key to their success was focusing on facts and numbers and bringing everyone together around the same information. This focus on facts helped individuals to check their bias and ideology at the door. As one participant noted, “The science was huge. If you have people who are arguing over issues, you can get beyond that by talking about the facts. It helped to get us past that

tension.” Bringing scientists to the table helped to build a shared understanding of the resource and understand possible alternatives. As one participant explained, “(the participation of scientists) was critical in providing an independent voice and a place for science. It changed the whole tone and brought the discussion back toward what was natural and what was possible.” For several participants in the conservation community, they felt that having scientists at the table allowed for them to focus on advocacy and not try to play two roles (of advocate and scientist). As one conservationist stated, “we often walk this line being advocates for science and advocates for management based on science and they are different things and difficult to do together. It was much easier to advocate for the use of science when scientists are at the table.” Despite the utility of bringing science into this collaborative, several participants stated that science alone is not the issue, but the personality and credibility of the scientist themselves. As one participant stated, “You have university scientists that are regarded as legitimate and credible and that credibility and the work has created the opportunity space. It revitalizes my belief in the land grant system, but I am not convinced that it works everywhere. Credibility is a very slippery thing and I’m not convinced that it is a sure fire thing.”

Engagement in science

Many of the participants mentioned the importance of the forensics field trip that helped to reconstruct how the forest had once looked. As one participant noted, “I think we really got a lot of excitement and enthusiasm in the field trip we did with the reconstruction. People started to look around and say, *Wow, this is what the forest looked like?*” Bringing facts to the table and gaining a common understanding of the resource had always been a key component of PLP, but this field trip helped build common knowledge in a powerful way. As one participant stated, “Everyone had buy-in because they were out in the field helping us collect the data that the assessment was built on.” By helping to collect data and learning how forest forensics was done, people had a more intimate understanding of the need for restoration. As one participant described, “the fact that the people were involved in gathering the data and then saw how the data was collected and analyzed let them buy in to the ecological justification for restoration.”

Listen respectfully

Participants stated that one of the most important actions in collaborations is listening. As one participant explained, “We had to be patient and not shortchange anyone who wanted to have the floor for a while.” Active and engaged listening was described as part of trust building and was seen as a way to demonstrate commitment to the process. As one participant reflected, “if it gets frustrating, you have to keep letting go of it because you are there to listen to each other and hear their needs so...there is some sort of commitment an individual makes.” Respectful listening was seen as one component of the culture of right behavior that develops within a collaborative process. One participant said, “You establish a collaboration culture: that you listen with kindness, that it is a table of trust and to come to it you have to be willing to listen.”

Chose your collaboration wisely

While participants felt that collaboration worked well in this instance, they also felt that not everything should be collaborative, and that it was important to decide when to use and not use it. As one participant stated, “I don’t think everything has to go through the long, tedious collaboration. It shouldn’t be an obstacle to the Forest Service doing their annual work plans. We aren’t the gatekeepers for the Forest Service.” Experienced collaborative members also felt that it was important to learn from past projects and build upon prior endeavors. As one participant said, “If there is a reason for me to reinvent the wheel, it should be the foundation for future projects.”

The art of the possible

The importance of balancing the *ideal* with the *real* is one lesson to be taken from this collaborative process. As one participant stated, “collaboration is the art of the possible—it presents the need to balance *best case* with what is *do-able*.” Although many of the participants would have liked to focus thinning on Ponderosa Pine stands, they realized that this might not be economically feasible. As one participant described, “I am standing in a forest area that needs restoration, no question. But it is also an area that doesn’t have much saw timber that industry could take and convert into a product that could help them pay for hand thinning and costly restoration. So we began to talk about

how do you make a project cash flow.” This eventually led to the decision to log high elevation spruce-fir forests in order to pay for thinning in the Ponderosa Pines. As one participant related, “(the conservationists) said they weren’t opposed to logging the high elevation forests, but they didn’t want it masquerading as restoration.” In this instance honest assessment of the ecological and economic impacts of the project led to creative solutions that everyone in the collaboration could live with.

Balancing thought & action

As one participant stated, “the collaborative process is about both action and thought, but you need both.” While it is important to build a common understanding of the resource, it is also important to take action so that people see results. As one participant remarked, “The communication, the multiple stakeholders at the table are important, but it is worthless if you do not move to action. We aren’t there yet.” One way that this balance can be maintained is by a mix of players who are interested in process and in the bottom line. As one participant related, “I have to think about how to get it implemented, which is important because you have to bring a perspective of reality into the group.” A collaborative too heavy on one or the other can be difficult to maintain. The balance between thought and action is an important tension for any collaborative group. As one participant summed up, “My dad always said *it has to start in the head first*, but action influences thought more than thought influences action and that is part of what made the UP project so interesting.”

Remain flexible

Several participants stated the importance of learning from past collaborative efforts, but realizing that each effort will differ based on the context, the issue and the participants. As one participant related, “We have been asked at PLP, *how did you do it?* And they said, *we don’t have the foggiest idea*, but it definitely is more process that structure. There are ingredients in it but the actual process will change group by group.” It is critical that participants remain open to learning and change instead of feeling that there should be set characteristics or processes. As one participant stated, “You just need to get into the process and see where it takes you.”



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Focus on restoration principles

For the UP Mesas project, it was important to focus on both places and principles before committing to management practices. The focus on place came through field trips, while the focus on principles allowed the group to think through their ideas about restoration before trying to apply them to actual places. As one participant noted, “starting with the restoration principles was a great idea...There was so much fighting at the beginning and once we put that aside and said, *if we were to do a project in some vegetation type, what would we want to accomplish?* and that made everyone more comfortable.” These goals created common ground instead of arguing over details. As one participant stated, “We also started to meet as a group and rather than get into the nitty gritty we decided to design restoration objectives which was a big picture approach. It helped the group come together and build trust.”